



Sexus Botanicus: The Love Lives of Plants

Joanne Anton

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Joanne Anton's *Sexus Botanicus* is an often playful, beautiful science book loaded with fascinating, substantive information about plants' reproductive lives.

Featuring clear, succinct prose and gorgeous color sketches, the book details the "sex lives" of more than thirty plants, ranging from lichen and moss to poppies, tomatoes, and fig trees. With suggestive headings like "Stolen Kisses," "Anything for Love," and "Hot and Fragrant," each chapter focuses on a different plant species, emphasizing the wide variety of reproductive strategies that have evolved over the 470 million years that plants have existed. Witty comments about the "joys of (plant) sex" are interspersed with thorough descriptions of botanical terms and the seductive nectars, fragrances, flowers, and fruits that plants use to attract pollinators and perpetuate the "miracle of life."

Birds and bees play starring roles, as with a local type of black bee that pollinates the rare silversword found only in Maui's volcanic ash, and the ruby-throated hummingbird with its long beak and extensible tongue that's perfect for pollinating the brilliant cardinal flower. Other highlighted plants include the ginkgo tree, which produces ovules that can be fertilized even after they've detached and fallen to the ground, as if the tree were laying eggs.

A species of the carnivorous pitcher plant evolved a symbiotic relationship with a type of ant that, immune to its poisons, clears debris and fends off attackers. The sacred lotus generates a cellular reaction producing heat (up to 97 degrees F) that, combined with its intoxicating perfume, attracts beetles and other insects. Other plant species depend on strange and unexpected bedfellows—such as geckos, lemurs, honey possums, and bats—to ensure their survival.

Entertaining and informative, *Sexus Botanicus* is a rich botany guide covering the amorous lives of plants.

KRISTEN RABE (September / October 2023)

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